R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 015 690 FL 000 600

STRUCTURE PLUS MEANING EQUALS LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY.

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PUB DATE 66

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.16 2P.

DESCRIPTORS- *AUDIOLINGUAL SKILLS, *LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY, *NUCLEATION (LANGUAGE LEARNING), *SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING, *TRANSFORMATIONS (LANGUAGE), LINGUISTIC THEORY, TRANSFORMATION THEORY (LANGUAGE), APPLIED LINGUISTICS, AUDIOLINGUAL METHODS, DEEP STRUCTURE, KERNEL SENTENCES, LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION, PATTERN DRILLS (LANGUAGE), STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS, SUBSTITUTION DRILLS, SURFACE STRUCTURE, SYNTAX, GRAMMAR,

TRUE FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY CAN BE ACHIEVED ONLY BY THE INTERNALIZATION OF THE ENTIRE GRAMMAR OF THE TARGET LANGUAGE PLUS THE DEVELOPMENT OF SKILL IN SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION. ADHERENCE TO EITHER OF THE METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS THAT UNDERLIE TODAY'S AUDIOLINGUALLY-ORIENTED PROGRAMS WILL LEAD STUDENTS TO NOTHING MORE THAN A LEARNING PLATEAU. THE "PRACTICAL" ASSUMPTION, IMPLICIT IN CURRENT AUDIOLINGUAL MATERIALS, TREATS ONLY THE SURFACE STRUCTURE AND NEGLECTS THE DEEP STRUCTURE OF THE GRAMMAR. BY FIRST INTERNALIZING THE SURFACE STRUCTURE AND THEN DRILLING THE DEEP STRUCTURE THAT IS ULTIMATELY TESTED WITH TRANSFORMATION DRILLS, STUDENTS CAN BE ASSISTED IN INTELLECTUALIZING THE BASIC SYNTACTIC PATTERNS ESSENTIAL TO LISTENING AND SPEAKING NUCLEATION. INVOLVED IN THE TEACHING PHILOSOPHY OF THE DIRECT VERSUS THE INDIRECT METHOD AND THE COORDINATE VERSUS THE COMPOUND SYSTEM IS THE "NATURAL" ASSUMPTION, WHICH CANNOT, REASONABLY, BE EFFECTIVE IN THE ARTIFICIAL, UNICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM WHERE THE NATIVE LANGUAGE IS AT VARIANCE WITH THE TARGET LANGUAGE NOT ONLY IN CONCEPT BUT ALSO IN STRUCTURE. BY MEANS OF NUCLEATION FOLLOWED BY INTENSIVE WORK IN AUDIO-COMPREHENSION AND READING, STUDENTS CAN BE TAUGHT SUCCESSFULLY TO CONTROL THE AUDIOLINGUAL SKILLS INHERENT IN THE CONTROL OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "THE FLORIDA FL REPORTER," VOLUME 4, NUMBER 3, SPRING 1966, PAGES 13-14. (AB)

ED015690

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There are two theoretical beliefs underlying modern language teaching today which are hampering the successful acquisition of a foreign language by the audio-lingual approach.

The first maintains that dialogue memorization and intensive pattern practice will lead to conversation in the second language. We shall call this the "practical" assumption. The second maintains that the learning situation of a student acquiring a second language should ideally approximate that of a child acquiring a first language. We shall call this the "natural" assumption. Both methodological assumptions will successfully bring the language student to where he is at the present time: *atop a plateau.*

The "practical" assumption is implicit in many of the audio-lingual materials designed for use in high schools and colleges today. However, many of the pattern drills in use treat the "surface" structure and neglect the "deep" structure of the grammar. Where drills are employed, they tend to be unrefined. Assimilation drills are not presented as part of an integrated drill type sequence: Simple Repetition, Simple Substitution, Simple Correlation. (1) The structural features are not arranged for efficient presentation. Little provision is made for "verification" or "testing" drills.

Often an assimilation drill will contain a sentence such as *Je vois venir mon père* as a base, and then will present a cue such as *fais* to produce *Je fais venir mon père.* These sentences and others in the drill contain the same surface structure (subject of finite verb, finite verb, infinitive, subject of infinitive) but not the same deep structure. Many textbooks do not go beyond this stage.

That the two sentences are different may be seen from the fact that *Je vois venir mon père* is a transform of the two kernel sentences *Je vois mon père* and *Mon père vient,* whereas *Je fais venir mon père* contains the kernel sentence *Mon père vient* but not **Je fais mon père.* Moreover, where the subject of the infinitive is object of the finite verb it may occur in a transform as the antecedent of a relative clause *(Je vois mon père qui vient).* Where it is not the object of the finite verb, it may occur in a transform as subject in a subordinate clause *(Je vois que mon père vient).*

Once the surface structure has been internalized, the deep structure should be drilled and then tested with transformation drills. In this way, a barrier can be set up to prevent wrong analogizing, i.e., unacceptable forms. (2) The following transformation drill is typical of this type of testing exercise:

Transformation Testing-Drill

Principle: Dual function of the "subject of the infinitive".

Problem: Transform the sentence on the left so that the infinitive appears as a finite verb in a dependent relative and/or subordinate clause, depending on the function of its subject.

Basic Sentence (Response)

1. Je vois venir mon père. ⟶
   (1a. Je vois mon père qui vient.)
   (1b. Je vois que mon père vient.)
2. Fais venir mon père. ⟶
   (2. Fais que mon père vienne.)
3. On entendait siffler les trains. ⟶
   (3a. On entendait les trains qui sifflaient.)
   (3b. On entendait que les trains sifflaient.)
4. Elle écoute parler Robert. ⟶
   (4. Elle écoute Robert qui parle.)
5. Nous envoyons jouer Michel. ⟶
   (5. Nous envoyons Michel qui joue.)
6. Il emmène boire le chein. ⟶
   (6. Il emmène le chien qui boit.)
7. Elle sent couler des larmes. ⟶
   (7a. Elle sent des larmes qui coulent.)
   (7b. Elle sent que des larmes coulent.)

etc.

The grammatical problem illustrated here is a simple one. But such an approach will go a long way to help the student "intellectualize" the basic syntactic patterns essential to listening and speaking nucleation. (3) However, this will not guarantee "mastery" or even "proficiency" in these skills. Moreover, contrary to common belief, any practice in speaking in the beginning stages of language learning should be performed in the interest of *reinforcing listening comprehension* rather than developing proficiency in the speaking skill. The term "audio-lingual" connotes this.

The "natural" assumption is implicit in the teaching philosophy of the direct versus the indirect method and the coordinate versus the compound system. This approach envisages the acquisition of a second language directly from association with events—without the use of one's native language. Yet it is unreasonable to expect that an artificial, unicultural situation such as the language classroom is the proper environment for such an approach. The administrative emphasis on academic year blocks rather than on individual student achievement makes the "natural" assumption a presumption. (4)

Environmental conditions apart, it is common knowledge that the mono-

(1) S. Belasco, "Structural Drill and the Refinement Principle," Int. Journ. Am. Ling., XXIX (April 1963).

(2) For analogical interference in the target and source languages, see S. Belasco et al. "The Continuum: Listening and Speaking," in **Reports of the Working Committees, 1963 NE Conference on the Teaching of FLS**, pp. 10-11.

(3) S. Belasco, "Nucleation and the Audio-Lingual Approach," **Modern Language Journal**, XLIX (December 1965).

(4) See S. Belasco et al., pp. 19-20.

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In addition to numerous articles on language and linguistics, Dr. Belasco has written **College French in the New Key** (co-author), **Anthology in Applied Linguistics** (editor & co-author), and **Applied Linguistics: French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish** (editor & co-author).

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lingual child interprets all physical and abstract concepts in terms of the structure of his native language. Later, if he studies a foreign language, he discovers that the new language differs not only in structure but also in concepts. The concepts sometimes are nearly equivalent or partially equivalent, but a concept in one language may be virtually nonexistent in the other language.

Differences in emphasis of "equivalent" cultural concepts often contribute to faulty comprehension. A single lexical item may prove a source of interference as easily as an involved grammatical structure. The more different the concept, the more difficult it becomes to exclude the use of the native tongue from the classroom. Witness the amount of class time and effort expended in charades and histrionics on the part of direct methodists trying to specify the meaning of *ventouse* or *tournedisque*. Surely one or two sentences of explanation in English can do more good than harm.

A student might control every structure and know the meaning of every word in a reading or listening selection without understanding the selection. For example, take the simple sentences: "—Tu veux que je te fasse le grand jeu? ou préfères-tu le marc de café?" (5) Even in the context in which it occurs, an advanced student of French will have difficulty understanding these sentences. Unfamiliarity with the exact nature of the concept results in the incomprehensible translation: "Do you want me to make the big play for you? Or would you prefer coffee-grinds?" Although the concept of telling one's fortune exists in both French and English, the Frenchman places the emphasis on the hand-waving, the abracadabra, and the reading of coffee-grinds. The American's attention is drawn to the crystal ball and the reading of tea-leaves. Thus, in the given situation an American might say: "Shall I look into my crystal ball? Or would you rather I read tea-leaves?" Note that an explanation in the foreign language using the expression *dire la bonne aventure* does not take into account the difference in *cultural emphasis* that is made in the two languages. Therefore, skill in "semantic interpretation" is of prime importance in developing real proficiency in the listening and reading skills.

We have suggested elsewhere that the learning of a second language be accomplished in three stages:

1) the pre-nucleation stage *involving all four skills,* where the basic sound patterns, sandhi-variation patterns, and syntactic patterns are internalized,

2) the post-nucleation stage, where a high degree of skill in reading and listening is attained by means of a twenty step operation,(6)

3) the mastery stage, where the student thoroughly controls everything he hears, reads, says, and writes. The comprehension of foreign films in genuine cultural situations—without recourse to sub-titles or learning crutches—is the supreme test for this stage.

Before real control can be achieved by the language student, the teacher will have to lead him from the "plateau" up the hill to language acquisition. This means nucleation first, then intensive work in audio-comprehension and reading.(7) Every teacher wants his students to make the journey, but few teachers want to go along on the trip. We still cling to materials that are familiar and traditional. The only difference is that they are now set to sound. We are most unwilling to expose ourselves to so-called "details" characteristic of a sound pattern-sandhi variation approach.(8) The greatest deterrent to language nucleation is the belief that such details are unnecessary. Only internalization of the entire grammar plus skill in semantic interpretation will guarantee the student real proficiency in the foreign language.

(5) Simone de Beauvoir. **Les Mandarins.** Gallimard, 1954, p. 42.

(6) See S. Belasco, "Nucleation . . .", pp. 490-91.

(7) With this statement we are not advocating a return to the grammar translation method. We are assigning a role to "translation" in the post-nucleation stage. The role of translation in language learning has yet to be determined experimentally. Its strict avoidance in the language learning situation has no scientific basis. It would appear that in making the "natural" assumption for the whole language learning experience, we may have thrown the baby out with the bath water.

(8) For such an approach, see S. Belasco and A. Valdman. **College French in the New Key.** D. C. Heath and Co., 1965.

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